



# *University of* **HUDDERSFIELD**

## **University of Huddersfield Repository**

Spatz, Ben

To Open a Person: Song and Encounter at Gardzienice and the Workcenter

### **Original Citation**

Spatz, Ben (2008) To Open a Person: Song and Encounter at Gardzienice and the Workcenter. Theatre Topics, 18 (2). pp. 205-222. ISSN 1054-8378

This version is available at <http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/id/eprint/19725/>

The University Repository is a digital collection of the research output of the University, available on Open Access. Copyright and Moral Rights for the items on this site are retained by the individual author and/or other copyright owners. Users may access full items free of charge; copies of full text items generally can be reproduced, displayed or performed and given to third parties in any format or medium for personal research or study, educational or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, provided:

- The authors, title and full bibliographic details is credited in any copy;
- A hyperlink and/or URL is included for the original metadata page; and
- The content is not changed in any way.

For more information, including our policy and submission procedure, please contact the Repository Team at: [E.mailbox@hud.ac.uk](mailto:E.mailbox@hud.ac.uk).

<http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/>

# To Open a Person: Song and Encounter at Gardzienice and the Workcenter

*Ben Spatz*

## **Gardzienice and the Workcenter**

Thanks to the pioneers of modern dance and physical theatre, many strong connections have been drawn between actor training and the study of movement practices and body-work. It is now common for schools and theatre ensembles to incorporate yoga, martial arts, contact improvisation, and body-alignment techniques into their training programs. Far less often are such connections drawn between acting and song. Voice work, even in experimental theatre, tends to focus on sound, breath, and resonance apart from song; and the two mainstream genres of song-based theatre in this country—opera and musical theatre—tend to be commercially oriented and to place greater emphasis on production values than on the interior aspects of acting. As a result, few training programs or theatre companies in the United States actively investigate the relationship between singing and acting, or between song and action.<sup>1</sup>

My aim in this article is to expose and begin to heal the rift that exists in this country between the study and research of acting techniques and that of singing, especially group or choral singing. With this goal in mind, I will describe and contrast two formally and historically related though essentially very different European groups that have done pioneering work in experimental performance: the Gardzienice Centre for Theatre Practices in Poland, and the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards in Italy. These two groups have been working at the junction of song and performer training for decades.<sup>2</sup> In each of them, the demand for virtuosic singing skills is an integral part of an ongoing exploration of actor training. This ongoing research relates not only to technical training, but also to the more delicate question of “how to open a person”—that is, how to help a performer develop the ineffable qualities that are variously called honesty, believability, or presence.<sup>3</sup>

I spent two years in Poland (2003–05), first as a performer and apprentice with Gardzienice and then as a Fulbright Fellow at the Grotowski Centre (now called the Grotowski Institute) in Wrocław. My experience with the Workcenter is as follows: I witnessed its work in Pontedera, Vienna, and Wrocław, and participated in a three-week practical seminar with the full team in Moscow and a one-week workshop with Associate Director Mario Biagini in upstate New York. In all of these contexts I was present as a practitioner rather than as a scholar; in other words, I was expected to participate in the work rather than to analyze or articulate it verbally. This article is intentionally written from that perspective.<sup>4</sup>

Gardzienice was founded by Włodzimierz Staniewski in the late 1970s and continues to operate under his direction today. The Workcenter was created by Jerzy Grotowski in 1986 and is now led by Thomas Richards, who worked with Grotowski from 1985 to 1999 and became his designated artistic heir. Both Gardzienice and the Workcenter maintain physical centers in relatively remote locations: the former in the tiny Polish village near Lublin for which it is named, and the latter outside the Italian town of Pontedera. Staniewski and some of the other founders of Gardzienice

worked closely with Grotowski during the 1970s until breaking from him in 1976 to form their own group. To this connection may be traced some of the most basic similarities between Gardzienice and the Workcenter, such as the premise of long-term ensemble work and a commitment to the highest levels of physical and vocal precision in performance. Both groups have created a very small number of works, each of which is developed and performed over a long period of time—sometimes more than a decade.<sup>5</sup>

Beyond these basic connections, the methods and missions of Gardzienice and the Workcenter are extremely divergent. In fact, it would hardly make sense to discuss them together if not for one additional commonality: the deep, extended relationships they have each cultivated with old and for the most part anonymous sources of choral song. Gardzienice worked for well over a decade with traditional Ukrainian and Polish folksongs, and then with medieval music, before turning in the mid-1990s to its current focus on the reconstruction of ancient Greek music. The Workcenter, meanwhile, has been working with selected groups of African and Afro-Caribbean traditional songs for over two decades. Other performative materials, such as gestural vocabularies and movement forms, are also drawn from these cultural sources, but the songs are undoubtedly the most crucial. It is their relationships to these particular kinds of songs and song sources that make Gardzienice and the Workcenter worth considering together despite their great differences.<sup>6</sup>

When Staniewski and his colleagues left Grotowski and moved across Poland to found Gardzienice, they explicitly intended to make *theatre* rather than *para-theatre*. Staniewski rejected the spontaneous, improvisational nature of the para-theatrical projects: “For me it was very important to make something with its own performative architecture, possessing more than changing ceremonies and rituals” (qtd. in Allain 54). But Gardzienice’s project was not a return to the theatre in any standard sense of that word, for Staniewski was no more interested in using a proscenium stage or in playing for an existing theatre audience than Grotowski had been; instead, he led his new ensemble on a series of artistic “expeditions” into the rural landscape of Eastern Europe:

Imagine a theatre ensemble packing their equipment into a bus and driving far away from the city life to hidden territories where there is no theatre, where the settlements and villages are isolated. Somewhere far in the mountains, for instance, where the roads are poor. The people get out of the bus at a prearranged place and they walk, pushing all their equipment on a loaded cart. . . . They find a stream and create a camp next to it, where they continue the work. They train, practice the music, rehearse the dialogues and the common scenes. There is a director, actors and some observers, who have been invited to participate, and some students. (Staniewski 39)

These expeditions brought the itinerant ensemble into contact with relatively isolated communities and cultural enclaves:

For the first twenty years the basis of the ensemble’s research was the “expedition,” in which members of the company traveled to remote rural villages in eastern Poland. Here the dominant Catholic communities co-exist with more marginal Gypsy, Belorussian, Lemko and Ukrainian cultures. Traveling on foot, the group spent a few days in each village, meeting with the local musicians and artists, exchanging songs and stories. . . .

In the following years the ensemble toured extensively. Expeditions to indigenous communities further afield took members of the company to Lapland, Mexico, Brazil, Scandinavia, South Korea, Italy, Ireland, Ukraine, the Balkans and Egypt. (Staniewski 4, 11)

Central to the purpose of these expeditions was the fact that the communities Gardzienice visited had their own living traditions of song. For Staniewski, the expeditions were much more than

an opportunity to find a new audience: they were part of his search for a “new natural environment of theatre” (4) and a different approach to performance. The expedition was an end in itself, with its own unique value, and it was never intended to culminate in a one-way spectacle for an exotic but passive audience. Instead, the company sought to instigate “gatherings” in the villages, which were “semi-formal meetings arranged in the villages’ communal spaces. Here the Gardzienice members would sing and perform extracts of a performance, while the local people would play instruments, sing, tell stories and dance in response” (8).

If theatre as we know it begins with the specialization of performers and their separation from a (passive) audience, then Gardzienice’s gatherings are clearly a different kind of event, as closely related to a festival or party as to an evening at the theatre. The main responsibility of the Gardzienice ensemble during a gathering was not to put on a show, but to stimulate a “fermentation” effect that would lead to the increased participation of the entire community (Staniewski 53). Furthermore, this process of fermentation began not with performance, but with the arrival of the company as a band of travelers:

Once you have arrived in a village, the preparations for the performance and the gathering are done in a very visible way to engage as large a proportion of the community as possible, such as building a common stage. Small groups of actors walk from house to house. They do small performances in front of, or inside, the houses. They are somehow identifying themselves and announcing what they are inviting people to participate in. You may rehearse with local musicians, and if there are storytellers you try to include them as well, if not in the performance scenario, then in the gathering. So the preparations should animate the local community as much as possible. (52)

Here, performance is a means to an end, a medium through which the ensemble can establish the trust of an unfamiliar community and interact with it. If successful, the gathering that results will be the culmination of a joint process of fermentation going far beyond what either the Gardzienice actors or the local people could have created on their own.

For reasons having to do with the evolution of both the ensemble and the cultural landscape of Eastern Europe, Gardzienice no longer makes regular expeditions. Nevertheless, a sensibility born of those rustic adventures remains visible in its work today, especially when it performs on its home territory. A contemporary visitor to Gardzienice on a full performance night (Gardzienice’s “Kosmos”) can expect to be led through the night forest by guides carrying flaming torches, and fed after the show with freshly cooked Polish dumplings. The actors greet the audience warmly and usher them to their seats, sometimes energetically stuffing them into very small spaces to observe the explosive performance pieces for which the group is now famous. This informal atmosphere offers today’s audiences a taste of what those older, more rustic gatherings must have been like, with food and drink and song and chatter overlapping and competing with one another for attention.

The last phase of Jerzy Grotowski’s work is at the very opposite end of the spectrum of performance, but it is similar to Gardzienice’s program of expeditions in that it demands an expansion or questioning of the theatrical event as defined by the separation of performers and audience. After a relatively short period spent in the United States, Grotowski moved in 1986 to Italy, where he was offered permanent support to run a small laboratory at the Center for Theatrical Experimentation and Research (now the Pontedera Theatre Foundation) in Pontedera. Taking with him three assistants, including the young American Thomas Richards, Grotowski founded the Workcenter there and supervised its work for 13 years until his death in 1999. Since well before Grotowski’s death, Richards has been at the head of the Workcenter’s operations, with ongoing support and increasing leadership from his associate Mario Biagini.<sup>7</sup>



The Workcenter's early existence, the project undertaken by Richards and his team, and the context in which they worked were at least as radically different from any standard definition of theatre as those of Gardzienice. In fact, Grotowski and later Richards have said many times that the Workcenter's central focus—for which Peter Brook coined the term “art as vehicle”—should not be called theatre at all, because it is primarily intended to function for those who are performing (the “doers”), rather than for anyone who might be watching.<sup>8</sup> Thus, although “from the point of view of technical elements everything [at the Workcenter] is almost as in a normal theatre work of long duration” (Grotowski, “Workcenter” 14), the Workcenter's practices represent at least as radical a turn inwards as Gardzienice's do outwards.

Lisa Wolford described the Workcenter in 1996 as “an extreme example of an enclosed culture, a world set apart” (69). Over the years, Richards and his colleagues have developed a number of precise, repeatable performance structures (or “Actions”), but these are not necessarily designed with an observer in mind and do not require the presence of an audience to be fully accomplished. The first Actions created in Pontedera did not even take into consideration “from which angle a visitor might witness” them (Richards, *Edge-Point* 58), and the doers were at first surprised, years later, when Grotowski began to invite a small number of people to come and witness what was being done. Since that time, many of those who have witnessed this work—by invitation only and never by purchasing a ticket—have agreed that calling it “theatre” is an oversimplification, perhaps even a disastrous one, because it fails to articulate the radical difference of its work and therefore its broader significance (see the writings of Zbigniew Osinski and Wolford in Schechner and Wolford).

For many years, the Workcenter remained “set apart,” in the sense that its work could only be seen through small, private meetings and work exchanges. This emphasis on private rather than public encounters is highly unusual when viewed from the context of theatre, which today refers almost by definition to public rather than private events, but it would not be at all unusual in the context of yogic or other traditional practices.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, the Workcenter has opened its doors in recent years far more than in the past, and it is no longer nearly as private as it was in the beginning. In 2004, it premiered a work called *Dies Irae* that was billed as a theatre piece and for which tickets were sold. Meanwhile, the 2003–06 Tracing Roads Across project had the Workcenter team traveling extensively throughout Europe and beyond, sharing its work with a great number of theatre groups and other interested parties. A full discussion of the center's current and recent work, like that of Gardzienice, is beyond the scope of this article.<sup>10</sup> For my purposes here, it is enough to examine their earlier practices with an understanding that these continue to strongly influence their current work—even though Gardzienice no longer conducts regular expeditions and the Workcenter has become more publicly visible.

From the above discussion, we can see that both Gardzienice and the Workcenter have approached the techniques of performance as a means to enable and serve an event that may or may not be classifiable as theatre. Preparation for Gardzienice's gatherings and the Workcenter's Actions resembles in many ways a long theatrical rehearsal process; however, the events themselves demand a reexamination of the concept of theatre, because they do not revolve around the familiar division between performer and spectator. In “art as vehicle,” no spectator is necessary; in a gathering, the performance group does encounter outsiders, but these outsiders bring their own performative material (songs, dances, and so on) and become co-creators of the event in a way that far surpasses what is usually called “audience participation.” Ultimately, both groups have demonstrated an active desire to rediscover the hidden or lost potentials of performance as a communal or ritual activity intended primarily to serve those who do it.

## Songs as Vessels

Why do performers in both Gardzienice and the Workcenter identify primarily as actors despite the central role of singing in their work? This point may seem trivial, but it indicates an important aspect of their approach: namely, that song functions for each of them as a kind of vessel for something else that pours into and is expressed through singing. In neither case is the production of music an end in itself. This is part of what separates their work from the genres of opera and musical theatre, and it has everything to do with the kinds of songs they choose to work with and the particular balance struck, in their work, between technical rigor and the performer's freedom to act.

For the sake of comparison, we might consider the relative balances of constraint and freedom placed on a performer by the enactment of text, narrative, choreography, a martial art, or a substantially different kind of song. One basic distinction is that singing is not a visual phenomenon and does not require the body to be held in any particular shape. The act of singing does sculpt the body, but it does so from the inside out, through the demands of sound production and the need to create precise pitches, dynamics, and resonances. In this way, singing is less like a choreography that determines the visible shape of the body, and more like a martial art that requires the precise direction of energy and force. Singing calls for the singer to produce a specific sequence of vibrations in the air; in doing so, it constrains the body more tightly than do textual or narrative structures, but far less so than a visually-oriented choreography.

The result is a unique balance of form and flexibility that paradoxically engages the whole body of the performer while leaving it relatively free. The effort required by the performer to produce the song without breaking its rhythm, melody, or resonance means that the interplay between song and performance, though it may be flexible, cannot be just a matter of collage. Some movements and actions will block the song, others will support it—and these body-voice relationships can be tremendously complex. Song places the performer inside a rigorous structure of time (rhythm, duration, dynamics) as well as other qualities (pitch, vibration, resonance), but it also leaves a significant degree of freedom. In this way, physical and other performative elements can be seen to pass through the *precisely carved, hollow vessels* of the songs used by Gardzienice and the Workcenter. These song-vessels are “precisely carved” in their musical precision, but they are “hollow” in that they do not strictly determine the position of the body, the emotions of the actor, or the meaning of a given action. The songs shape, but do not strictly determine what flows through them; this relationship is complex, neither random nor predictable.

All of the songs discussed here are old, and they come from old cultures. Ukrainian folksongs, Afro-Haitian chants, and reconstructed ancient Greek music all bring with them a cultural grounding and historical context that stretches back for centuries. One senses that these songs deserve a kind of respect, whether simply because they are old or because the fact that they have survived this long implies an intrinsic merit. Working on a very old song is different from working on a song that was written by a living composer.<sup>11</sup> Separated from us by time, space, and culture, old songs offer a kind of mystery that may entice us to search for their inner meaning through a kind of archaeology of song. Their age may also help us resist the urge to innovate for the sake of innovation. Finally, songs whose authors are anonymous—or so ancient as to be essentially so, even if we know their names—are part of a profoundly public domain. Underlying this work is a belief that today these songs belong to whoever cares to work on them, since in many cases they are actually in danger of disappearing.<sup>12</sup>

Once work has begun, the facts of a song's origin are less important than the details of its musicality. To begin with, a note about language: the songs of Gardzienice and the Workcenter are almost never in the language of those who sing them, nor are the performers expected to learn the linguistic meaning of the words through translation. The result for the singers is that they receive a precise and sometimes difficult structure of articulation for the mouth, lips, and tongue—one that has

all the features of language and may even encode a kind of meaning through its phonetics—without any of the linguistic content carried by words. In practice, singing in a foreign language is as different from singing shapeless vowels as it is from singing lyrics in a native tongue.

More importantly, the folk origin of these songs means that their basic forms are relatively simple. Simplicity is what allows a song to serve a whole community—as a work song, a marriage song, or a funeral song, for example—and also what enables a song to be used in the context of performance work that also involves movement, interaction, narrative, and other elements. The melodic and harmonic complexities of classical opera music, by contrast, are so technically demanding that they would render impossible the other kinds of performative work enacted by Gardzienice and the Workcenter. Such complexity in singing, like the complexity of ballet in dance, encourages the increased specialization of performers into categories: singers, dancers, actors. The simplicity of folksongs, on the other hand, means that they do not have to be sung only in concert style or by professional singers; instead, they can be performed with fluid physical engagement and by those whose primary vocation is acting. To master the kinds of singing done by Gardzienice or the Workcenter takes many years, but not because of the melodic or rhythmic complexity of the songs themselves—rather, because of all that which passes through them.

Above all, the distinguishing characteristic of the songs described here is that they are ensemble songs, group songs, choral songs. Where solo parts exist, these are almost always in relation to the group: rising out of it, responding to it, leading it, challenging it, and eventually returning to it. Different kinds of song require different kinds of group coordination, such as harmonic resonance, rhythmic synchronization, or call-and-response, but “tuning” in a broad sense is always essential. Here, we can also observe an important difference between the group coordination involved in singing and that of dance, owing to the physiological differences between the sense of hearing and that of sight. Because hearing is not directional as sight is, group singing can achieve high levels of interpersonal coordination without requiring line-of-sight contact. When a space is filled with ensemble singing, individual performers can tune into one another and the group directly from any angle or location. This allows for a kind of spatial flexibility that is not possible for a group of dancers except by using live or recorded music as an intermediary to accomplish the same goal, or by listening to the sounds produced by the movement (such as breath and footfalls).

Here the similarities end, and we can begin to examine the profound differences between Gardzienice and the Workcenter in their choice of songs and approach to singing. In the case of Gardzienice, a clear connection can be drawn between its expeditions and gatherings and the aesthetic style developed by the ensemble: “In the outdoor space, lit by burning torches, the actors sang both religious and popular songs, performed acrobatics and joked with the crowd, kissing the women which, according to Filipowicz, caused ‘shrieks of laughter’” (Staniewski 7). The intense energy of Gardzienice’s performances comes as much from the folk culture of the villages it traveled to as from the intentions of its actors. The following is an account by Staniewski of a church ceremony in a small Polish village, but it could just as easily be a description of Gardzienice’s second performance piece, *Awwakum*:

Because it was such a tiny church, it was overcrowded and people were compressed together like a thicket. Everything that happened there was so unbelievable: vibrating, touching, energizing. . . . They were in touching distance of each other in this throng. All the stages, sequences, procedures, sounds, songs and candlelight generated enormous energy. (110)

That Staniewski was inspired by the energy of this congregation is evident, and the theatrical fragments he was then beginning to create were designed to ferment exactly this kind of energy—as well as to hold their own against the pace and dynamism of such an event once it had begun. Staniewski’s early work was also inspired by Bakhtin’s writing on Rabelais and carnival, and Gardzienice’s performances have always revealed strong influences of the carnivalesque. They are fast

and furious, with very few pauses, and to this day full to bursting with “dissonance and tensions, songs and dances, shouts, whistles, moving processions, flights heavenward, sensual desire, magical spells, incantations and a maddening whirling” (Staniewski 10). The atmosphere invoked by such explosive, precisely timed cacophonies is that of a wild party—even now, when the guests are more likely to be theatre students and scholars than peasants or gypsies.

The roughness of the situations Gardzienice encountered on expedition and the challenges these presented were precisely what Staniewski sought. Out of this was born a theatre that not only accepted but actively necessitated the inclusion of elements and entities from every possible register and context. Radical inclusivity is essential in rough contexts, as Peter Brook eloquently pointed out in *The Empty Space* when he compared the conditions of the “Rough Theatre” to those of war:

Putting over something in rough conditions is like a revolution, for anything that comes to hand can be turned into a weapon. The Rough Theatre doesn't pick and choose: if the audience is restive, then it is obviously more important to holler at the trouble makers—or improvise a gag—than to try to preserve the unity of style of the scene. . . . The popular theatre, freed of unity of style, actually speaks a very sophisticated and stylish language: a popular audience usually has no difficulty in accepting inconsistencies of accent and dress, or in darting between mime and dialogue, realism and suggestion. (66–67)

Brook's passage evokes the frenetic reality of rough theatre, as well as the fact that inclusivity as a theatrical principle does not imply anything haphazard or random. Actual chaos is seldom compelling, so Brook's Rough Theatre is much more a “sophisticated and stylish language” of *apparent* chaos. For Staniewski, this inclusivity extends even to the inclusion of the natural world as a concrete ingredient of performance. One striking example is Staniewski's recollection of the time he “introduced a local villager into the performance [of *Carmina Burana*] together with a horse and a pack of dogs” (121). This is an extreme example of how “anything that comes to hand can be turned into a [theatrical] weapon,” including not only gestures and objects, but also people, animals, and natural phenomena.

In order to hold all these disparate elements together, Gardzienice has developed a unique approach to musicality that is both strong and precise. Indeed, the forceful qualities demanded by the earlier context of expeditions and gatherings can still be heard in the ferocious musicality of its current work: powerful rhythms based on 3, 5, 7, 9, or even 11 beats; relentless, animal-like cries that are timed precisely to intervene and coincide with the songs; intentional, well-orchestrated harmonic discordances, as well as very few pauses or silences, and no real breaks of any length. For all their rhythmic and harmonic precision, the songs of Gardzienice are massive, sturdy vessels, designed to contain everything that might arrive in a gathering—dances and shrieks, dogs and farmers, stories and old storytellers—and to drive these elements forward in the fermentation process.

The Workcenter's “art as vehicle” can be seen as the culmination of a long process moving in the opposite direction: not inclusivity, but exclusivity—to whittle away everything except that which is absolutely necessary, stripping down theatre until only its most essential and intimate act remains. In fact, the Workcenter's practice is more specifically focused than the name “art as vehicle” implies, and might be better understood as “*performance* as vehicle.” This is an important distinction, because painting, poetry, and perhaps even playwriting and stage direction can also be used as “vehicles” for the artist or doer. However, only in live performance are the artist and the art-object identical, the doer inseparable from what is done.<sup>13</sup>

Over the course of his life, Grotowski painstakingly sought to remove from his work every aspect of theatre that involves the physical separation of artist from art-object. This eventually



meant the reduction or elimination not only of lighting design, set design, costume design, choreography, musical composition, and playwriting, but also of direction in the theatrical sense. In “art as vehicle,” there is no “director,” no one whose task is to compose the montage that will appear in the perception of spectators. The montage is designed instead to function for the performer or performers (Grotowski, “From the Theatre Company” 124). Someone working as an “outside eye” in this context is therefore not a director in the sense of “professional spectator” (119), but rather a teacher or guide—hence Grotowski’s final self-identification as a teacher rather than a director (“Performer” 376). Ultimately, Grotowski’s considerable skills as a composer of stage montage proved incidental to his real goals.

This long process of stripping away can also be seen in the basic differences between Ryszard Cieslak’s work in *The Constant Prince* and that of Thomas Richards in the current *Action*. In both cases, a profound and personal revelation could be seen unfolding through the performer’s actions. However, in the case of *The Constant Prince*, this act of revelation was framed and protected by layers of design and direction that do not exist in *Action*. In the former, Cieslak’s score was linked to a memory of love that was “very far from any darkness, any suffering”; but this was framed by a montage of textual and visual logic that “suggested [Cieslak] was a prisoner, a martyr whom [the other characters] try to crush” (Grotowski, “From the Theatre Company” 122–24). Cieslak’s intimate joy was hidden and protected behind the frame of this montage, which was so well-designed that some people believed Cieslak was actually suffering when he performed.

In *Action*, there is no such theatrical montage, and nothing in Richards’s work seems hidden. Three small examples further illustrate this: first, the utter simplicity of the objects used in *Action*, which are clearly intended to help the doers rather than the witnesses enter the world of the performance. (For comparison, consider the rudimentary props that actors use in the early stages of rehearsal, as opposed to the finished versions that usually replace them by opening night.) Second, the lack of an artistic title for the work. The names for the Workcenter’s different Actions are pragmatic rather than artistic: *Downstairs Action* took place downstairs; *Pool Action* involved a plastic children’s pool; *Main Action* was primary at the time. Artistic titles like *The Constant Prince* or *Apokalypsis cum Figuris*, on the other hand, are part of the montage constructed for an audience. This is obvious from the fact that “the Constant Prince” refers not at all to Cieslak’s personal associations, but only to the images that framed it. Third, the general absence of physical contact.<sup>14</sup> Physical contact has a very different meaning when it is composed according to the tactile and sensual experience of the performers rather than for visual effect. This could lead to a different line of research altogether—one that did not appear to interest Grotowski.

Cieslak compared his acting score in *The Constant Prince* to “a glass inside which a candle is burning” (qtd. in Schechner and Wolford 203). Extending this metaphor, I would suggest that the production montage of *The Constant Prince* was like a stained-glass image: illuminated by the flame of Cieslak’s inner work behind it, but also possessing its own content and meaning. The production montage of *Action*, on the other hand, is much closer to clear glass, intended to protect and reveal the work of the doers with the greatest possible transparency. If one looks in it for the work of a director, choreographer, composer, or playwright, the Action can be strangely difficult to perceive, almost as if there were nothing there. It is only when one looks at the acting work itself that the content and meaning of the Action become apparent.<sup>15</sup> For me, the experience was like trying to look at a clear pane of glass, and then suddenly realizing that another person was there on the other side.

The formal structure of *Action* is far more visibly elaborated than that of sitting meditation or even Tai Chi, but it is also more austere than one would expect from a theatre piece designed for an audience. In concrete terms, *Action* appears to be based on a few relatively simple techniques and forms, most or all of which predate the Workcenter’s founding. Those that can be easily named are the ones drawn from traditional sources: African and Afro-Caribbean songs, the Haitian *yanvalou* step, and ancient Gnostic texts. That these materials are externally simple once again has the effect



of directing the attention—that of the doers, the teacher, and witnesses if they are present—away from the formal composition and towards the interiority of the doers. It discourages and renders almost impossible any outward display of purely technical virtuosity, while making visible the more subtle accomplishments of the doers, including a kind of care and precision that illuminates from within these apparently simple forms.

In this way, emphasis is taken off the composition of *Action* and placed on the quality with which it is enacted: the focus is not on what is done, but how it is done. This is most evident in the singing, which reveals an approach to songs that treats them as vessels in an entirely different way from that of Gardzienice:

It is not a question only of capturing the melody with its precision, even if without this nothing is possible. It is also necessary to find a tempo-rhythm with all of its fluctuations *inside* the melody. But above all, it is a question of something that constitutes the proper sonority: vibratory qualities which are so tangible that in a certain way they become the meaning of the song. (Grotowski, “From the Theatre Company” 126, emphasis in original)

What is it that is called, held, and protected by the song? To some degree, the answer to this question is a private matter that can only be articulated between the performer and the teacher or guide. A witness can see the precision and detail of the actions and can be profoundly affected by the presence and risk-taking of the doer, but only to the degree that the inner work becomes tangibly incarnated in physical action and especially in song.

When asked to explain what exactly takes place “inside” the frame of a song or line of actions—and whether this content is physiological or emotional, personal or objective, technical or spiritual—Grotowski and Richards use a kind of delicate misdirection that simultaneously affirms the language of the questioner and suggests it is insufficient. For example, on the topic of energy centers in the body, Grotowski asks: “Do they belong to the biological domain or to one that is more complex?” (qtd. in Richards, *Edge-Point* 77). Richards, on the subject of singing, says similarly that “there is a level of sonic resonance, but not just” (37). And he clarifies: “One might imagine that what I speak of is a very strong emotion. Well, the emotions might be involved, but it’s not just that” (45). In each case, one register of analysis is provisionally accepted but marked as insufficient, while another is invoked without being named. What takes place is not only biological; it is not only sonic resonance; it is not only emotions.

If Gardzienice’s brawny songs were bred to hold everything under the sun, then those of the Workcenter have been painstakingly crafted to shelter and contain the most delicate and fragile of processes. Rather than stuff everything in, their way has been to take almost everything out. In both cases, the production of music is a necessary premise for the act of singing rather than a goal in itself. Furthermore, that which flows *through* the songs cannot itself be technical. If it were—if it could be written down, articulated, or repeated exactly—then it would be part of the vessel rather than the flow, part of the glass rather than the flame. The flame has no static form, because it is alive—it is life. The flame is that which arrives again in each moment, always changing, always new. The flame is the encounter with the present.

## Practices of Encounter

In addition to the techniques described above, both Gardzienice and the Workcenter employ rigorous *practices of encounter*—by which I mean a kind of ongoing test or challenge wherein the performer responds in the moment to something unknown and unpredictable. Encounter, precisely because it is unpredictable, can be a practice but not a technique. In both contexts discussed here, the encounter takes place inside precise technical work on singing (as well as other theatrical elements,

to a lesser degree). If the singing requires considerable technical skill, then the encounter requires something else—something nontechnical that might be called “presence”: that is, the absence of self-consciousness and posturing.

A practice of encounter must be intensive, persistent, and long-term if it is eventually to transform the performer. One can imagine both Grotowski and Staniewski asking themselves: Under what circumstances are the demands of encounter most intense? Or, what is the highest possible standard of authenticity in meeting the Other? Their answers to these questions could not be more different, but each in its own way pushes the practice of encounter to its limit.

For Grotowski, the most severe testing of authenticity could only take place between close working partners under intimate and protected conditions. Long before founding the Workcenter, he wrote of the need for individual, interpersonal encounter: “It is not theatre that is indispensable but: to cross the frontiers between you and me; to come forward to meet you, so that we do not get lost in the crowd—or among words, or in declarations, or among the beautifully precise thoughts” (“Holiday” 223). Most frustrating to Grotowski was the kind of false intimacy that he saw in amateur theatre artists who try to reveal themselves all at once, forgetting that tremendous effort and patience are required to discover real intimacy. Grotowski railed against over-familiarity and excessive sociability in working conditions, demanding that partners in the work start from a premise of respectful separateness before seeking to meet one another: “Looking for connection,” he wrote, “one should begin with disconnection” (“Tu Es Le Fils” 296).

Next to singing, the most essential aspect of the Workcenter’s craft seems to be the development of acting scores or lines of physical actions, and inside these we can most easily see how the test of encounter takes shape in its work. Grotowski, Richards, and others affiliated with the Workcenter emphasize the following point, which they trace back to Stanislavski: the emotions cannot be scored technically. For them, the desire to set emotional responses as part of a score is a grave danger:

There will arrive a moment when, for example, an actor is trying to achieve falsely an emotional climax. You, as spectator, then start to feel some kind of shame, and for an instant look away. . . . And it was clear to Stanislavski in the end of his life, and is clear to Grotowski, that emotions are not subject to our will. Don’t tamper with them. What we *do*, this is subject to our will. (Richards, *At Work with Grotowski* 103, emphasis in original)

For Grotowski, the line between the false display of emotions and the true experiences that might arrive to an actor through associations and actions was absolutely clear, and needed to be judged by the highest possible standard—that of a trained, long-term working partner. Grotowski was concerned only with what was unassailably genuine, and never with what a less discriminating eye might settle for. An audience of strangers might be fooled by fake emotions—or, if not fooled, might not care enough to speak up—but Grotowski’s test was merciless: his actors had to be “believed” not by strangers but by their most intimate professional colleagues. In such a context, the significance of the director shifts away from personal vision and towards the accurate perception of an actor’s interiority. It becomes more like that of a personal coach or spiritual teacher, who must empathetically perceive the quality of a student’s attention as well as external results. In this way, the truth of the performer’s experience can become the top or sole priority of the work. The phenomenon of “believability” is grounded in the present moment of the actor and becomes entirely independent of an imagined future audience.

With Cieslak, Richards, and others, Grotowski aimed for total and organic accord in performance between the acting score and the performer’s inner life. Such purity demands immense patience as well as privacy, and it was made possible only by the intensely protected circumstances

in which Grotowski worked. He described his work with Cieslak on *The Constant Prince* as follows: “I demanded everything of him, a courage in a certain way inhuman, but I never asked him to produce an effect. He needed five months more? Okay. Ten months more? Okay. Fifteen months more? Okay. We just worked slowly” (qtd. in Richards, *At Work with Grotowski* 16).

With no pressure to produce entertainment value according to an imposed timeline, the search for authentic life inside an acting score can be taken to its farthest extreme. In such a context, the art of the actor is not called upon to compromise with that of the director, designer, or producer. To carve out protected space of this kind takes great determination, but without it, certain kinds of work cannot take place. As Richards explains:

This “inner action” demands a very minute kind of unbroken concentration. If I am put in a conventional theatrical situation, with a true crowd of people present, and all of the situation which can be around, it seems to me that the dangers which might present themselves for this work would be enormous. It might be easy to lose or to falsify this subtle process, which is so delicate. (*Edge-Point* 28)

Grotowski stopped making theatre productions in part because it seemed wrong to charge admission for work as personal as what took place in *The Constant Prince* and *Apokalypsis cum Figuris*. Accordingly, one cannot buy a ticket to see the Workcenter’s Actions—nor are there any publicly available videos, audio recordings, scripts, or translations of their work. Those that do exist were until this past year never shown or distributed without the presence of core team members.

Gardzienice, in contrast, has for years organized conferences, art exhibitions, book publications, and other events in and around Lublin, and many of its works are available on video. At the same time, Gardzienice’s expeditions and gatherings represent a completely different and even opposite practice of encounter: one that involves seeking out communities of total strangers. These communities are chosen in part for the very reason of their cultural difference, and for the challenges this difference provides to the ensemble as it seeks to ferment a gathering. Staniewski describes such encounters very clearly in terms of a testing process that leads to a transformation:

The actor can tell whether he is capturing the attention of the audience and whether he possesses all their senses. At the same time, the actor is challenged to tune his way of acting to the different levels of this symphony of reactions in order to tune the audience. This is an effective school for actors, helping them to naturalize their means of expression. It is similar to a Pansori opera singer whose voice has been cultivated in a classroom and on the stage of the opera house. Then they go to the waterfalls to test the strength, quality and the color of the voice, exercising it against the noise of the water. (54–55)

The demands of fermentation and festivity are utterly opposed to those of privacy and patience, and an entirely different approach to the performer’s interiority is to be expected. That which is prohibited in the monastery is absolutely necessary in the tavern; likewise, actors hoping to foment energetic gatherings in foreign territories cannot possibly treat the emotions in the delicate way described above by Richards. In Gardzienice’s work, performed emotion is not given any special treatment at all. Instead, the performance of emotion is put to compositional use just like any song, gesture, or prop. Thus an actor’s score might as easily call for a certain kind of sobbing or laughter as for a specific song or acrobatic move, and representations of the deepest emotions can be found alongside the crudest physical and vocal gestures, in a great unholy marriage of the sacred and the profane.

This means that the emotions displayed in performance will rarely or never correspond to what an actor is feeling internally—and, in such rough contexts, that is exactly as it should be. Here,

the separation of actor and score is a basic premise—just the opposite of the unity that Grotowski sought in what he called the “total act.” The test of encounter here does not come from the content and structure of a performance score, but from the unfolding of the expedition as a whole: arrival, introductions, gathering, fermentation. The confrontation with song and score takes place within the confrontation of audience or community. The content of the performance is necessarily secondary to the event it enables, as Staniewski makes clear: “Our intention is not just to bring a performance to a village. We present fragments of our performance as we are working on it, but the main point is to stimulate a gathering. The real performance and the real event is the gathering” (53).

Furthermore, in the specific circumstances of Gardzienice’s expeditions—the ensemble arriving unannounced, the villagers surprised and often mistrustful—virtuosity is not the only or even the primary requirement that allows a gathering to occur. What appears as a test of skill is also a test of sincerity, goodwill, humility, and even innocence:

How do you identify yourself? Through your own song, you announce yourself as someone who is an innocent. Through this “concert,” you present what your sense of life is about, through your work. . . .

You must demonstrate your own abilities as perfectly as possible. . . . You do not treat these people as primitive, uneducated or culturally underdeveloped. You treat them more seriously than the audiences in professional theatres. It is so obvious to say this in terms of guaranteeing a serious response, but it also enables you to create and improve the ethics of your own work. (40, 53)

Staniewski’s use of the word “ethics” draws a clear link between skill and honesty, between the technical and the personal. On expedition, one’s arrival is never preceded by critical reviews or friendly recommendations, and the temptations of commercial success are removed as surely as through intense isolation. Every encounter is a new beginning in which the actors arrive as foreigners and must prove their integrity through the events they help to bring about. This also, then, could be described as the “highest possible standard” for authenticity: to convince a group of total strangers, across great cultural difference, that they should accept the group’s performances and even offer their own in exchange.

For Staniewski, at least in the early years of Gardzienice, this context clearly promised a greater demand for honesty than could be found within a frame of theatrical expectations. In the context of expeditions and gatherings, a manipulative or condescending attitude on the part of the actors would lead to a cold or even violent response. It was only as truly sincere and humble travelers that the ensemble could succeed in fermenting the gatherings it desired. Thus, although Staniewski’s methods were in a sense opposed to those of Grotowski, he too understood the theatrical event as a continuous testing process for the actors, on personal as well as professional grounds.

Both the enclosure of the Workcenter and the expeditions of Gardzienice represent ongoing practices of encounter in which the performer repeatedly confronts the Other. In Gardzienice’s case, Otherness is found across the sociocultural landscape of a geographic region; in the Workcenter’s “art as vehicle,” it is found among members of the performance team, as well as within each performer. Gardzienice traveled to indigenous communities “to look for the small pieces of something, the gesture, the word, the saying, the tone, the expressiveness of breathing, the devotion to that and only that place” (Staniewski 24). It could be said that the Workcenter has conducted a parallel search across the internal landscapes of its ensemble members. Furthermore, these very different methods of personal and artistic transformation have been described by Grotowski and by Staniewski in strikingly related terms:



When I speak of art as vehicle, I refer to verticality. . . . The question of verticality means to pass from a so-called coarse level—in a certain sense one could say an “everyday level”—to a level of energy more subtle or even toward the *higher connection*. (Grotowski, “Untitled Text” 11, emphasis in original)

Compare Grotowski’s verticality with Staniewski’s fermentation process:

[A gathering] is not a competition but it is to “rise up,” like a flourishing process in which you see the energy of beauty, of effort, of searching for the next revelation. . . . If you don’t have this capacity to encourage, to dynamize, to open the other side, you do not create this elevatory process. Instead, it becomes fixed on a certain level of consequent exchange—first you sing, then they sing, and so on. The dramaturgy is not fermenting. (53)

Grotowski’s articulation touches on the explicitly spiritual, while Staniewski’s does not. In both cases, however, the act of singing allows for the development of an interpersonal and transpersonal encounter that is not only musical. And then, in this relationship between song and encounter, there is in both cases something that can be described as a passage upwards.

## To Open a Person

The problem of actor training can be formulated as a search for concrete, practical methods by which to increase the tension between spontaneity and structure in the act of performance. The groups described here offer superlative examples of rigorous structure in their songs (and other formal elements), but their approaches to spontaneity—their practices of encounter—are equally important. Through a synthesis of these elements, the performer is stretched between two simultaneous demands: the technical demand to maintain the formal structure, and the nontechnical demand to respond to the present moment of the encounter. The first is precisely predetermined, while the second is adamantly unpredictable. The quality of presence that arrives through these multiple demands is that of spontaneity made visible (or audible) through form.

Here, then, is one possible answer to the question posed at the beginning of this article: How to open a person? Teach them a song. Then, without breaking that song, have them encounter someone else, a total stranger or an intimate colleague. Remind the performer that the encounter is not real unless it provokes a spontaneous reaction in the Other. Have them fight to maintain the rigor of the song and the back-and-forth of the encounter at the same time. Over a period of months or years, such practices can bring about a real transformation in the performer’s perceptive and expressive abilities. As the songs are learned more and more precisely, the performer’s ability to respond to the encounter becomes greater and more perceptible. Stretched between the poles of form and spontaneity, the body, voice, and vitality are called to readiness, made available, opened.

In the contexts described here, song is an essential type of structure through which alertness and receptivity are expressed, spontaneity becomes perceptible, and an extended encounter can unfold. Of course, tension between spontaneity and structure also exists in other performance modes, ranging from the structured improvisations of jazz and sketch comedy to the highly formalized genres of classical music and ballet. Nevertheless, I have written about Gardzienice and the Workcenter here because I believe their work offers unique and vital challenges to the practices of contemporary theatre and performance in the United States. These challenges can be articulated as a series of questions that theatre and performance artists might ask ourselves about our work.

*First question:* What encounter takes place in the performance event? Unlike film and other arts, the question of who encounters whom in a performance event does not remain open indefinitely. Live encounters are finite; they end when performances are no longer given. Given this fact,



it is surprising that the encounters taking place in most theatres today are so randomly determined. I mean that audiences—which usually cannot even be seen from the stage—have not for the most part been personally selected by the artists; instead, they arrive in response to a generalized marketing campaign. In this sense, they are simply consumers—except that it makes no sense to think of an unrepeatable live event as a consumable product for the general public. And even in cases where the audience is largely composed of family and friends—such as school plays or very marginal productions—performances are almost never explicitly directed toward the community that is actually present; instead, every attempt is made to act “as if” the performance were being done for a much larger “general public.” It may even be a matter of pride to underplay the specificity of the audience.

We have seen, in the expeditions and gatherings described above, what a more consciously determined theatrical encounter might look like. Of course, one of the problems faced by Gardzienice has been that it is increasingly difficult to find communities that are capable of spontaneously offering their own performative material in response to that of a visiting ensemble. This is a serious issue, but it cannot be understood to signal the impossibility of expeditionary theatre in the industrialized world. The challenge offered by Gardzienice is simply, but undeniably, that we evaluate sincerely the motives behind the encounters that take place in our theatres and the depth of exchange that is reached. In comparison with Gardzienice’s expeditions, the idea of audience “outreach” seems far too complacent. Instead of trying to lure our desired audiences through clever marketing, why not go directly to them?<sup>16</sup>

*Second question:* What encounter takes place within the performance ensemble? This question is nearly impossible to answer when the ensemble is a temporary one that has been assembled based on casting decisions rather than the goal of encounter. Of course, once the actors have been chosen, they will meet one another during the rehearsal process—but how different would that meeting be if encounter among the performers were foregrounded as a primary goal from the start? Many actors are starving for deeper, more process-based work, but they are also afraid of spending time on work that cannot be immediately justified in terms of future spectators. Some performers even feel—perhaps secretly—that the essence of theatre for them lies not in the performance event but in the rehearsal process, where the possibility of real intimacy exists. But even in the most leisurely rehearsal process, the pressure to produce an art-object for general consumption often interferes with more subtle processes of artistic and personal discovery.

In the current entertainment-focused climate, a strong division exists between performances and workshops or classes. In a workshop or class, participants expect to be taught a clearly defined skill, and too much experimentation on the part of the leader may arouse suspicion. Rehearsal processes, on the other hand, can sometimes be more experimental—provided that they are “justified” before too long by public performances. As a result of this dichotomy, the idea of a professional institution or ensemble that is permanently devoted to experimentation and research, and for which the demonstration of results remains secondary, is almost unthinkable.<sup>17</sup> It can be difficult even to articulate, in this cultural context, how such an ensemble could avoid being self-indulgent. But the Workcenter offers a glimpse of just such a “theatre turned on its head,” in which artists serve their own encounter first, rather than the audience—and their accomplishment speaks volumes about what theatre loses when it defines itself only as a method for producing shows.

*Third question:* What is the role of technical skill and craft in these encounters? It would be a grave misunderstanding of Gardzienice and the Workcenter to focus only on their practices of encounter, and not on their commitment to technical excellence. Precisely because it takes place at the border between the technical and the nontechnical, the work of these two groups can be an essential point of reference for performers who seek to unite external form and internal content. Is it a coincidence that, as I mentioned above, the two existing theatrical contexts for singing—opera and musical theatre—are also two of the most product-oriented? Why, on the other hand, does the most patient and interior work on the subtleties of acting so rarely involve singing? This may

partly have to do with musical genre; certainly, the classical music of opera and the pop of musical theatre cannot function in the same ways as the songs described in this article. In addition, many people—especially those who live in urban areas or who are not religiously affiliated—have little or no experience of song as a communal event. On the other hand, it is not as if ancient, foreign, group-oriented traditional folksongs are the only ones that can serve as vessels for practices of encounter. Other possibilities surely remain to be discovered.<sup>18</sup>

The questions outlined here demand time and space for patient exploration and experimentation. This is the indispensable “research and development” wing of theatre—but where can it take place, and who will fund it? In an essay at the end of Richards’s book, Grotowski suggests that North American universities could dedicate a substantial portion of their resources to exactly the kind of long-term, ensemble-based performance research that the commercial world of “show business” can or will not. He asks, for example, why drama departments keep to standard production schedules when they do not have to:

[H]ow is it possible to study Stanislavski for two or three years and prepare an opening in four weeks (as is often done in [drama] departments)? Stanislavski would never have accepted it. For him, the minimum period of work on a performance was several months, and the opening took place only when the actors were ready.

Outside of the drama departments an explanation exists: the lack of funds. But inside these departments usually there are funds, even if minimal, and—what’s more—there is time. They can work for four, five, nine months, because they have time. Drama departments take as actors their students (who are not paid), so the rehearsals can be as long as needed; but generally they are not. (“From the Theatre Company” 117)

As far as I know, this challenge remains largely unmet. Grotowski might also have asked why university theatre departments do not more often take on experimental projects that explore the edges of theatrical practice rather than its well-accepted centers. Perhaps many of those who design and administer academic programs believe that these kinds of investigations are a thing of the past, with little or no value for the present. The work described in this article proves otherwise.

---

*Ben Spatz* is a doctoral student at the CUNY Graduate Center in New York City. He studied philosophy, literature, history, and dance at Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut. Ben leads the Urban Research Theater project and teaches workshops throughout New York City. For more information, please visit <[www.urbanresearchtheater.com](http://www.urbanresearchtheater.com)>.

## Notes

1. Meredith Monk’s extended vocal technique may be an exception to this rule, but few theatre ensembles or actor-training programs have been able to incorporate her methods into their own. Another possible emerging exception is the hip-hop theatre that can be seen in New York City’s Hip-Hop Theater Festival, with groups such as Universes and Full Circle.

2. Choice of vocabulary is a delicate issue throughout this article, as the Workcenter in particular uses specific language to distinguish its work from conventional theatre. Throughout this article, I have avoided using the terms “theatre” and “actor” to refer to the Workcenter. When speaking about that which is common to both Gardzienice and the Workcenter—the broader category that includes both “art as vehicle” and “art as presentation” (see below)—I have used the words *performer*, *performing*, and *performance*. I do not use “performance” to

refer to discrete works such as *Awwakum* or *Action*, although in Gardzienice and elsewhere the word has that meaning also.

3. In discussing their work, I am acutely conscious of the fact that Gardzienice and the Workcenter have developed their work in relative freedom over a span of decades. This kind of long-term performance research is increasingly underfunded in Europe, and even more so in the United States. The specific circumstances that funded Gardzienice and the Workcenter in the beginning are unavailable to groups just starting out now, and any attempt to draw inspiration from either group will have to reckon with significant obstacles in finding the resources of time and space needed to do high-quality work. Two US contexts in which this possibility does exist are actor-training programs and long-term companies such as those in the Network of Ensemble Theaters.

4. The specific works that inform this article are as follows, with a note about the source of my knowledge in parentheses. Gardzienice: *Awwakum* (seen multiple times on video), *Carmina Burana* (seen multiple times on video), *Metamorfozy* (seen live and performed in multiple times), *Elektra* (performed in multiple times), and *Iphigenia at Aulis* (seen live multiple times). The Workcenter: *Downstairs Action* (seen once on video), *Action* (seen twice live and once on video), *The Twin / An Action in Creation* (seen live in two different versions), and *Dies Irae* (seen live multiple times).

5. As a result of these connections, the relationship between Gardzienice and the Workcenter may appear stronger than it actually is, especially to those in the United States. For example, Ellen Stewart of New York's La Mama Experimental Theater Club once referred to a theater company born out of Gardzienice as being like the "grandchildren" of Grotowski, implying a direct line of descent (Sellar, "Memory Songs"). Gardzienice, however, would prefer to be viewed as a separate entity and not as a descendent of Grotowski. The fact that after 30 years Gardzienice is still being situated primarily in relation to Grotowski (see also Sellar, "Iphigenia at Aulis") only underscores the near-total lack of this kind of work—and an ability to understand it—in the United States. (Addendum: A similar point was made recently by Lisa Wolford Wylam in *TDR: The Drama Review* 52.2 [2008]: 127, a special issue dedicated to "Re-Reading Grotowski.")

6. Over the years, the work of Grotowski, Staniewski, and their collaborators has inspired a loose web of artists and practitioners who also cultivate long-term relationships with the ancient and traditional song groups. Despite the tremendous differences that exist among them, it is reasonable to consider these artists in relation to one another, as part of a theatrical family that exists alongside other theatrical families such as those associated with Lecoq or Boal. Further investigation of this subject might begin with the following groups and individuals. In Europe: The Odin Teatret in Denmark; Theater Slava in Sweden; Song of the Goat Theater, Theater Wegajty, Theater Zar, Chorea Theater Association, and Studium Teatrálne in Poland; Farm in the Cave in Prague; Haitian practitioner Maud Robart; Ang Gey Pin of Singapore; the Center for Independent Theater Research in Milan; and the British Grotowski Project in Kent, England. In the United States: The New World Performance Laboratory in Ohio; Double Edge Theatre and Pilgrim Theatre in Massachusetts; Akropolis Performance Lab in Seattle; the North American Cultural Laboratory in upstate New York; Antero Alli's work in San Francisco; and Theater Dzieci and my own Urban Research Theater in New York City.

7. In the first period of the Workcenter's existence, there were two working teams, one led by Thomas Richards and the other by Maud Robart. Later on, a theatre group from Singapore led by Ang Gey Pin was in residence at the Workcenter. I hope that future publications on the Workcenter will shed more light on this history than what is presently available in English.

8. Grotowski has also distinguished "art as vehicle" in the following way: "In theatre performances in the strict sense, that is in art as presentation, normally one of the indispensable elements is the story, the narration. A story is told, even if the essential may be something else. For the observer of *Action*, however, it would be more pertinent not to look for a story—the analogy would be rather poetry than narrative prose" ("Workcenter"

13). This explanation is misleading, however, because it suggests that the absence of narrative is a defining characteristic of “art as vehicle.” Clearly, many art forms that do not tell a story (such as abstract painting, classical music, and much poetry) can still be considered “art as presentation” insofar as they are designed for an audience. Furthermore, one can see in Richards’s descriptions of his work (see Richards, *At Work with Grotowski* and *Edge-Point*) that there are indeed narrative elements in the Workcenter’s Actions, but they are designed to serve rather than be served by the performers. It would therefore be more accurate to say that narrative is one of many compositional modes which, in “art as vehicle,” are designed to directly affect the doer rather than spectator. Later in this article, I further suggest that the Workcenter’s “performance as vehicle” be distinguished from the broader category of “art as vehicle.”

9. The Workcenter’s “art as vehicle” has been compared to embodied spiritual practices like yoga and to rituals such as the ancient Mysteries. One fruitful connection that has not yet been explored is to drama therapy. It seems that the crucial different between the Workcenter’s “art as vehicle” and drama therapy is that the role equivalent to that of a therapeutic patient or “client” is filled at the Workcenter by professionals rather than amateurs. If the mere concept of a “professional drama-therapy client” sounds like a contradiction in terms, this is only because of our culture’s assumptions regarding mental and spiritual health. In our society, therapy is most often framed as a kind of “cure” for a problem, rather than as a life-long and potentially full-time process of work on the self.

10. Addendum: For more on the Workcenter’s current endeavors, see *TDR: The Drama Review* 52.2 (2008).

11. In fact, a living composer named Maciej Rychly did work with Gardzienice on the reconstruction of ancient Greek music. However, it is clear that Gardzienice’s approach to this music is deeply informed by their earlier work with traditional folk and medieval music.

12. For more on the disappearance of folk music and its replacement by recorded music, see the work of Alan Lomax and the Association for Cultural Equity <[www.culturalequity.org](http://www.culturalequity.org)>.

13. Addendum: My suggestion that “performance as vehicle” is more specifically accurate than “art as vehicle” is affirmed by the forthcoming publication of *Doorways: Performing as a Vehicle at the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards* by Mario Biagini and Lisa Wolford Wylam (Seagull Press).

14. I am grateful to Piotr Filonowicz of Warsaw for bringing this point to my attention, which is particularly striking in contrast to Gardzienice’s contact-based acrobatic work.

15. At a recent panel on the Workcenter at the Performance Studies International Conference, Richard Schechner said that in *Action* he sees great acting but no directing. This is accurate from a theatrical perspective, but it fails to take into account everything in the Workcenter’s practice that goes beyond “great acting.”

16. There are, of course, a few US theatre companies that do travel to work with specific communities. Cornerstone Theater in Los Angeles is a strong example of this, and it would be worthwhile to compare and contrast the nature of “community-based” projects in the United States with Gardzienice’s expeditions and gatherings.

17. The closest example of such an institution in US theatre may be the Actors Studio—but that only meets four hours per week, and different actors take their turns at each session. More rigorous are some groups that practice yoga, meditation, or a martial art, but even these usually have to dilute their intensity in order to achieve economic sustainability in this country.



18. In my own work, I am investigating the possibility of a slow process through which original songs might be developed that can function in some of the ways described in this article. I invite information and contact from artists working in related areas.

### Works Cited

- Allain, Paul. *Gardzienice: Polish Theatre in Transition*. London: Routledge, 2004.
- Brook, Peter. *The Empty Space*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996.
- Grotowski, Jerzy. "From the Theatre Company to Art as Vehicle." *At Work with Grotowski on Physical Actions*. Thomas Richards. London: Routledge, 1995. 115–35.
- . "Holiday." *The Grotowski Sourcebook*. Ed. Richard Schechner and Lisa Welford. New York: Routledge, 1997. 215–25.
- . "Performer." *The Grotowski Sourcebook*. Ed. Richard Schechner and Lisa Welford. New York: Routledge, 1997. 376–80.
- . "Tu Es Le Fils De Quelqu'un." *The Grotowski Sourcebook*. Ed. Richard Schechner and Lisa Welford. New York: Routledge, 1997. 294–305.
- . "Untitled Text by Jerzy Grotowski, Signed in Pontedera, Italy, July 4, 1998." *TDR: The Drama Review* 43.2 (1999): 11–12.
- . "Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards and Action." *TDR: The Drama Review* 43.2 (1999): 13–14.
- Richards, Thomas. *At Work with Grotowski on Physical Actions*. London: Routledge, 1995.
- . *The Edge-Point of Performance*. Pontedera: Documentation Series of the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski, 1997. [Addendum: This interview was recently republished in a slightly different version in Thomas Richards, *Heart of Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2008).]
- Schechner, Richard, and Lisa Welford, eds. *The Grotowski Sourcebook*. New York: Routledge, 1997.
- Sellar, Tom. "Iphigenia at Aulis." *Village Voice*, 16 October 2007.
- . "Memory Songs." *Village Voice*, 26 April 2004.
- Staniewski, Włodzimierz, with Alison Hodge. *Hidden Territories: The Theatre of Gardzienice*. London: Routledge, 2004.
- Welford, Lisa. "The Occupation of the Saint: Grotowski's Art as Vehicle." Diss. Northwestern U, 1996.